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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

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Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity Holds Hearing to Review VA's VR&E Program

WASHINGTON, DC –Members of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity met yesterday to hear testimony regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs Fiscal Year 2012 budget for the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) program.

VR&E is a program designed to return disabled veterans to the workplace through individualized rehabilitation plans, including education training and job placement.

Subcommittee Chairman, Marlin Stutzman (R-IN) expressed both his support for and concern about the VR&E program and its budget, stating, "Clearly, the Members of this Committee support the concept of vocational rehabilitation. However, the Department of Veterans Affairs has been somewhat cavalier in implementing the provisions in section 334 of Public Law 110-389 that require VA to conduct a longitudinal study of at least 20 years' duration of three cohorts of VR&E participants. I find that unsatisfactory in light of the generous budgets given to VA since passage of that law."

Representatives from several Veterans Service Organizations agreed that while VA budgets have been generous, VA could do more to make the VR&E program more accessible to veterans and more accountable to their needs. John Wilson, representing the Disabled American Veterans noted that, "VR&E only conducts a 60-day follow-up on individuals recently employed as a measure to determine if they are 'fully rehabilitated.' Even more disturbing is the fact that if a veteran discontinues VR&E services, regardless of the reasoning, VR&E reports it as a successful case of 'full rehabilitation.'"

Reflecting the general mood of the Subcommittee, Chairman Stutzman noted that, "There is an old saying in business – if you don't measure it, you can't manage it, and unfortunately, the Department's reluctance to fully implement Public Law 110-389 does not improve the current shortage of data that could help us improve the performance of this program."

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